

lfer blond face swans in the dark lavender water inside an  
acorn-shaped globe of the type once seen in druggists' windows.  
Bits of old varnished .sur-ritcu.s itrid the rcst of Lli;iL  
ruoijil.,4 iiiulowing,clutlor suri,ourid her. Eyes the color  
of that liquid ? they have become blank in it as now she leans  
∞orw44r,d Lo put a linger on Lhc bluish globe, blocking out  
everything but cylinders of honey-colored hair.  
The face rcassorts itself, blond and dreaming, the now-small  
finger tracing, too slowly, a rising carbonation.  
she disappears and the water instantly warms from the hoavy  
burgundy

V.) .4-h

light of the room,,,that immediately replaced by a salmon-red  
face of a young man, the c,,irbonations curving up from his  
gaping mouth. She has said something to him, slowly muttered,  
and ending withástate of undress<sup>1</sup>it is alatost as though her  
first few words had boon sucked up into the heavy light, the  
burgundy drapes, the spongy rug with its circle of faded roses.  
lic has sprung up, his fingers like the shadows of minnows in  
that

his shirt, its buttons magnified to the  
ìI see nothingill he is yelling over the globe. áThe futuros out  
there not in your dream-globe or in this dusty room makes you  
chokel Youl @;taring and mooning and reading I d et know what  
kind of morbid books for lady undertakers or somethingµ  
ìRedt Donlt! Pleaseí But he has taken off his shirt, has dropped  
it

lavender water as he is undoing

sizu ou quarters.

3

over the globe.

His skin proves to be a patchwork of red and startling white  
with scattered tufts of red hair, and she has recoiled, getting  
the globe between them, but he stretches over it to grab the  
navy kerchief attuchod to her puwdcr blue middy blouse, leads  
her towards the-árl massive grand piano where she manages to  
pull away, shouting,áGo to West Fourth Strectl You woet gct  
anyLhing hcro∞iHell Verna. Excuse my French and my manly chest,  
but I might as wull b(; d,,tinned ,At; t LuLiii s.irincr. I  
conic in hure wilhouL a collar ut@d fm called undressed. Jim-i-  
neeeel You sure yoJre not my mother\_ìOh ltu(l. Doet you evor

say a@t-hing at all. But she was stepping towards him as she said it, is tracking along a bicep with a tentative knuckle now, whispering "Oh lied everything is so darn awful" "Verna Verna Verna..." his own whisper moves a spray of bright hair against her cheek. "It is so awful" she repeats, up on her toes and leaning to him, her voice one with the softness of a pink branch outside which drifts past a crack in the tall drapes. He leaps back, flinging his arms wide. "Look at that! Will you look at that! And he is all but dancing in agitation, the blotches on this chest and belly hectic and pulsing. "Tell me Verna, ain't that a magnolia blossom out there and it's November eleventh? I tell you it doesn't know what season it is out there. I'd drive you crazy altogether"

She has turned away from all his movement, is breathing on the closed lid of the grand piano, watching her breaths disappear from its varnished

flat surface. "Is ... that what you came here for, Red? To drive me crazy"

A few flashes from outside wave across his freckled forehead before he answers in a breathless rush: "I'll come to get you out of this house"

5

where you can't even breathe in this room your dad should rent to the undertaker cause it's like being dead to stay here instead of running down to the Delaware River out there and ripping off all our clothes and swimming like crazy maniacs!!! In his enthusiasm he slaps the enormous piano and pain snakes across his forehead like lines on a complex chart. His voice hops an octave; "The war is over! Today!!"

Verna slides along the piano and by him to plop into a mushy after a moment

and nondescript Victorian chair, impatiently rearranging the ends of her kerchief to make them fall evenly upon her light blue blouse. "The war" he is enunciating, "to end wars" both hands on his rising rind and white pot belly as she makes a little tent with her fingertips under her chin and stares at that flaring belly with resignation. "The ... Great ... war ... is over.!!!" "Thank God ... on the one hand" she sighs, her gaze going down to the gummy buckles on her shoes.

The dispiritedness he had gathered from her tone he will remedy in a moment from the center of the room after brushing past the globe with his shirt over it, setting it to rocking, the glint of the blue liquid visible through tiny holes in the grty

worlimate shirt. I will love and respect you until the day that  
I die he shrieks with a hat to make her lift her head. Oh I don't  
know she whispers, I just do. The tiny lights from the  
still-rocking globe catching at her cycles. The day of the  
beginning The very day of the beginning This from  
the center of the rug, inside the rim of faded roses, week  
I; is -itimping-

Back in her characterless chair, her shoes turn in, almost toe  
to toe

(Yes and

as she sobs into his wrist going into a new era Vernal  
ready to explode with it! You can't cry on the very day of the  
beginning,

6

lie is an orator now, slowly raising a finger. Oh put your shirt  
back on, Red. And he watches his finger drop, as he puts a  
scowl on his face, it becoming as red as his naked back. She  
is rubbing her eyes with both fists. You get excited and then I  
have to hate myself for weeks. Oh I don't care about that  
today he snaps cheerfully. No offense, but how can you  
curry ... ? Why so much is changing out there has waving both  
arms you won't even recognize the world next year. Why if I  
be like coming here from some lousy little flyshit country in  
Asia

ever,

or somewhere. Excuse my French. Why there'll be airplanes to  
fly you from here to hell and back. And back to hell she  
pronounces quietly, dropping her arms on the arthritic-looking  
wooden armrest of her chair and pushes back further,  
her cylinders of honey hair - its horse-  
colored  
plush.

As if reviewing a parade he waves one hand and then the other.  
All of his visible skin glows. I'm needed out there, Verna.  
President Wilson needs me. I lie is sick. You'd finish him  
altogether. She strains, as if  
speaking forth from some crushed and exhausted vein. Vernal  
Darling Verna! We have made the world safe for democracy and now  
it's time to get on with the future. Hmph Sure it is ... if  
you're a boy that is. Everybody'll proclaim Red, even

girls.11And Ihe farmer took another load away■ Her golden head  
snaps up  
in the dim and heavy light.ìVerna you are much too sweet to say  
such a thinglll

7

le shc lcts hor hoad fall into her hands. áoh fm  
so gorv. My swoetncss

rr, Li @ k ,(, h-a  
it

is sorry too.11 He stumblingly approaches her 0 te.\*her hands  
away

A@L,) rif, n

from hcr facc and then starc, Lrociously into her eyes. Bu +hhis  
blazing

tA

eyes all of a sudden go blank as he hops and grimaces, digging  
at his chest and stomach as she becomes animtted in the attempt  
to grab his arm. áNow you stop itill she is scolding,áthe more  
you scratch the moreáI caet I caet I canltlll backing up from  
hcr outstretched hands, the piano at his back finally stopping  
him, his sliding along iu curved lid as ir she tkkru@itcnd to  
pursue. áMitybe ifs this dark damn room or this summer in  
November weather an4hat da mn false armistice they called it iwo  
ur three days ago whon cvcrybody thought the war was over. I  
went half crazythen itchingl It took everything I had out of me.  
I got nothing lcft.11 lie forms both hands into fists, thrusts  
them down  
at his sides.

{Thank God¼ she exhalcs,\into the deepening burgundy light.  
ìVernal The world[Y  
ìAgain,ìIt it it it is going by seventy miles an hour∞ Red  
jerks his hoad upward as if following the path of a rocket. áOh

surc your dad is a good fellow but thisillpointing gravely and revolving around the

wholc hcauy roomáis him.11His brown study.11 Her small bubbly laugh at his perplexed forehead, the freckles sliding into folds.ìUh. Right! I have to take my shirt off here just to breathe.

The air here is all dead, Verna. JiminceíìAppropriately enough<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> she comments, her eyes distant and cloudy,ìfor mc.11

ëYou tirc ,ill uf lifo I  
er

8

fie is again peering at hor intensely, though over a great/distance. áAll all of life.11 His eyes glaze; hers @x qttiodj liar-dun.ìJust get out of here, Red., Please-ìIrl a M(Jlncn[<sub>7</sub> fic is plvaaing, Ill;ur I will never again offend you by imposing even my love and devotion upon you. My worshi<sup>l</sup> Worshipill She so slowly crosses lier lcb)s, alter a mumcnt snecrinp,,áYeah, well probably the churches are open.11 But she quickjy uncrosses them Lo di-@iw LliL-iii up lit; Lulls ;tL lici-, slidireg the last fcw ECUL with his hip along the piano bench, ending up with his hand seizing her knee. áTcll me something Verna<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> ho explodes. áPlease please tell me somethingl. Please<sub>7</sub>

Gripping his frtl@ h@and sh(j st@ttesáI would. AnyLhiriL,. 1<sup>1</sup> you would tell me ... 11Aint it a new man th(;y want? They want a ncw manl A man like like me, me and ... Maxwell.11 This last name is spoken in eye-shut reverence but shc slaps his hand away and pushes him until he scrabbles backwards and then stands; hisbelly hanging down as he brushes off his knees.

She shakes her head as if to erase everything. áMaxwell?

Maxwell? Why why why fve never seen his little belly. Maxwelll Hahl Let alone his hang-down thing.11 She spreads her knocs inside the pale blue skirt, slides further back int@he mushy chair. Red kneels again but with a thump, then knee-walks betwo<sup>n</sup> her legs in order to brush his hand across her lips.ìDoet ever let any things but sweet things get into your mouth<sup>∞</sup>

She snaps back erect to shove him away, swing at his trailing hand and managing to hit the tip of one finger, b@ing it back. áfm sick to death of all your sugar-nonsense too<sup>∞</sup>

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lic strides around the r(j(jtti, smacking his hand against a thigh to relieve the pain. Jimine Verna, you got some wallop there. I just don't want to hear anything about Maxwell from you. I knew you came here to bring him up. You damn Cadillac stops in mid-stride, but momentarily for he continues marching up around the dark room, scraping little dust clouds. Verna shakes her head rhythmically, very slowly, the cylinders of hunky-blond hair falling ever more slowly. Anyway Verna, Maxwell and I are those new men Wilson wants. Let your butt in dollar. And with the world going by seventy miles an

hour well your father-why hell Verna and excuse my French again-sorry but this is revolving with his arms extended to indicate the whole room

but staring down at the piano as if her father were rooted there beside it. cl;Aw:0thii i:i Iiiiiii0 Verna throws both hands to her face, the slap like a tiny explosion. Jid looks up. She looks at him in a quiet, measured way, "You ... we betrayed Maxwell, betrayed him. And I never wanted him anyway. And now I've betrayed him." His arms crossed against his protruding belly he stares Byronically into the stiff drapes and sobs, once, as if practicing for a greater grief. 2. "Maxwell" he whispers sibilantly, "returns from the war and to the loveliness which belongs to him. It tightly belongs to him." No! Oh Jesus no! "And I" as he is banging his chest with a fist, "go forth without a heart but with a mind." She flails his arms as he stands towards her. "The opposite, you pompous idiot!" He stops to stare at her agitation, her chair bumping

and scraping, her dark blue kerchief flying about. must now help pound his chest with both fists, his suspenders starting to

to

slide down over his knobby shoulders, his trousers bagging at the knee. she drops her face into his arms as if afraid; he pulls his suspenders back while repeating idly prating whispers of its loveliness, the loveliness, ah yes the loveliness. "I belongs to him."

And you borrowed? comes her muffled comment. "You you you you you'll,

She is trying to rise, the roomlight darkening the still tears on her cheek, but he is too close to her now, making her fall back into the chair with a dusty woosh, then flattening each tear with a finger, hissing. "Doest you ever demean yourself in my presence. Never again in my presence. Your purity. a a a a stream forever flowing. There can only be lovely words for you and the ones coming out of you too."

But she manages to leap past him, emitting a sort of mangled squeal which increases with her distance away. When the piano is between them she turns to face him. "Red! No more horseshit! You're just so much horseshit!" Dimples play in each flushed blond cheek. "I'm ... damaged goods. And in this very room where I promised Maxwell I'd wait until he stopped the hunt! Goddamn hunt! She wrings her hands as if to crush them, their reflection bone white in the lid of the piano. "You did, Verna! We both did." And him in hopping pursuit, suspenders falling. "Ifs ... where we both waited." A wedgewood plate wobbles on the wall and he stops to study it. "That's the trouble," sighs Verna, "what we did when we both waited." The plate commemorates Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. It salutes, his face grayly reflected in a wedding picture next to the plate. "I salute that returning Roman!"

She is crying softly into her hands, a few hairs bright between her fingers, her hands pale gold in an inclined shaft of dusty light. "He won't want me now. Never."

"You're worriedly. I could wrong. It is too much of a man." her

She lets her hands fall away from her face and snorts, "Then you must know more about him than I do." "I'd continue to quietly advance. "And stop right there!" as if for Jesus God's sake will you keep your suspenders up? Must I be constantly reminded of my disgrace?"

He turns his back and walks purposely to the center of the rug, Liliwi wills to face her again, announcing while flipping one suspender up that "Maxwell is too much of a man and a noble Roman. He knows!"

Flipping the other the "I'm passionate!"

Anf, U.) i A  
 A As Verna wildly cries, her head on the massive piano @ hair  
 fanned out bumpily, lied peruses the n(;arly threadbare  
 roses under his feet as if some chorus of affirmation would issue  
 up from them.  
 fie itijucts citch huavy word whonevur h(- can bctwuoli her  
 sporadic outbursts:ìMaxwell ... is one ... of the great ...  
 souls ... of this or any other nation.11ìOh God shut upθ Sbc has  
 jerked her head up and is shoving her hair back with both hands,  
 stretching her white forehead.  
 lied bows. áYour smallest wish is my urgentest command.11  
 He remains in his bow as Verna methodically shakes her head.  
 After more than a minute, with the whole room shifting and  
 groaning and the sunlight inching across the piano lid, she  
 turns her face to catch the weak wiriduwlight, her dimples all  
 but drinking it in as she despairsáOh God Red, when yo're  
 not naked and slobbering after me, yo're half naked and  
 illiterate.11  
 He unbends with conscious grace, covers both nipples with his  
 hands. áI will leave.11  
 ìDo. It makes no difference, I see you everywhere anyway, even  
 in that silly globe Daddy brought from the store. You got me  
 Red. You have me. Always inside.11 She leans towards him; he  
 stcos@ back and, crossing his arms

12

irl ¶t-oriL u¶ his chust, glarcs aL her- iiiipuriously. áMaxwell  
 IThaL Lliat ltuinanl he proclaims in the half-darknes@.  
 áTtiuri l3uL hi.,, ¶acc orl ,i cu@lit. I w:iril yuu. siidifig  
 Lowards Iiiiiii,  
 her fingers ever so slowly drumming along the curved lid of the  
 piano,  
 l@la\$hing frum its varnished surface. áI¶s you I want.11  
 He awaits her, rooted. áI couldet.11ìYou did.11  
 Red thrusts his palms out although shos is still ten feet Or so  
 away. She advaricus more slowly now @is ir to guar@Intee that  
 she said all that she wanted before she touched him. ItI doet  
 want to wait another minute. Why hos so noblu iL,d probably  
 Lultu him yeurs to f,)et around to wha,t you got around to right  
 away. The day Max leftl One second patting my hand and the  
 next... f 11 ltud @kvoids h(;r, re,,ich:iiiLhknd,.i, takesáA ¶cw  
 stops backwards until his feet tangle and he falls onto a  
 horsehair Sofa, his eyes bulging as he contacts a protruding



spring, his rod and white skin taking on a chestnut sheen. áTo  
 my shamet To my everlasting shame<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> he croaks. áThe the the the  
 passion ,i@-izod iti(; like strunt, dr,inkill  
 She is beside the sofa and looking down at him and almost  
 singing. áNever mind all of that. I want you, my bird in  
 hand.11It, it would be the final betrayal of the man we both  
 love, you with the forcc of a tempest.,,  
 She rolls a slow curl into his red hair. áSomewhat less.  
 Zephygd do nicely. You marry him. That would be besif all you  
 men could marry each other.,iThoso as he compacts his body on  
 the sofa to get his head away from her twirling fingeráare not  
 your words, Verna. The•re from from some fast magazine for  
 women orsomething, thinking the futuros going to make them like  
 men. Max will lift you above all of thatu  
 iOh your IOVCIY Iuvely Maxwclll All silence and sentimentality-  
 and when he does talk hos even a bigger idiot than you are.11  
 She sifLIl sLan(Js ovur him as his hands fly to his t@ace with a  
 quarter sub.iThank you so very much, Verna. Oh go ahead and  
 hate me. I deserve your hatred and that o∞all doccnt  
 Christians. Passion held me, my tool in his handsi mean I was a  
 tool in... of  
 She drops to the rug laughing and he iissumcs the pose of a nude  
 in a coolly melancholy study. And when she stops laughing her  
 voice seems Lo ∞uuther out ur the dark to him. áoh (Wd, i(ed, I  
 used to dit- for him tu say something, anything. He might as  
 well have never left, be hanging over therc in the drapes like a  
 duad weight.11 In the ensuing silence hoofbeats are heard,  
 muffled and distant. áHow I boiled inside for him to :;Y  
 44r,ytfiitil,...@anythirig al  
 In her sad musing she is unaware that Red is again in motion  
 until sho hoars him bang a thigh against the piano, a noise  
 which sickens her. She rolls over on the floor, stares at the  
 brown, receding carved-tin ceiling until lieΣs huad flyuats into  
 view like a balloozi. áI woet hear it I woet hear itill he  
 demands, his face purple,áwhile he hammered the hun at Saint  
 Mihiel, in in in in the Argonne with Black Jack Pershing, doet  
 you, doet you think that the world has rubbed off on good ole  
 Max? Doet you? Paris, Francel I)urisssskiss Francul Thoso ... 11  
 ho dances an angular can-can,áparley-vooo Fran-say girlsill  
 She hugs hur knees and sighs, which he takes for disapproval and  
 stops dancing. áWell anyway I bet they taught him a thing or  
 two. Excuse me for talking this way, Verna.11The war waset  
 that long, Red. And I wish thafs all you talked about.toiVernal  
 11 He jams his eyes shuts opening them after a bit to see her

floating to the piano, then depressing the keys slowly so I@ to  
iaitku rio sourid. áIf I were Maxwell<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> and Red must hold his  
breath to hear her, áI would have fudged cvcry onc of them« ThLn  
she instantly waves her arins Ind screams at himáVernal Bad ba@d  
Verna∞

lied ula4ps his hatrilis together iinLI gathers himself up in  
what both recognize as Maxwell-like dignity. áYou<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> he intones  
like an aged preacher, ll, tr, c ttic voritablu !Arigcl o∞  
Wilifiiril,, Luii, L)Uluwaro.11

Her cue seems to beáange∞ and she starts banging out demonic  
chords

Aridhro s

,;cr-ccchirig Ili;Ud@,u mudgc fu(J[,c ∞udgc ∞u(l&)el ll lie runs  
over and -Lw

his arms around he@ but she stiffens so)that he desists. At that  
point

shemakcs a very delicate rur;pnlthu keys with lied hissing, áYuur  
mother, Verna,

yourmother∞

iShell as the music trills ll i.,i nutzy-futzy fuckut-y-wuck  
cr@lzy.

And fm following suit.11

And now his hand guntly ori her skiuuldur she cries almost  
silently. áYou ... put me through too much, Red. I caet take it  
all. Your words doet go with the rcst of you. oh whcrel Whera  
arc you going, Red? You must be going somewhere. Oh God I  
should have been a boy∞

fic rubs her shoulders with both hands as she drops her hands on  
her lap. áExcuse my French, Verna, but wore getting old damn  
fastand if I was to turn izito your- uld man fd run right out  
now and have them shot me.11

She whirls around un tho bench, her knees high to knock him  
away. áJust you never mind Daddy! Wh•re you always talking about  
Daddy? iScittle down Carl• turn into him.11iWell I doet want that  
either. Oh Red why caet you see? Maxwell will go to that darn  
pharmacy school at Pennsylvania Vniversity and holl work with  
Daddy and fm never get to leave here. Never! Never leave this  
room∞

And now the blotches on his chest are rust colored as the crack in the drapes admits a dim red light; her wet eyes are reflected as redsilver streaks in the smcary glass on the wedding picture on the wall behind him. Her speech will slow, as if the heaviness in the rooø's atmosphorc and tho grinding inevitability shc has forcscn had combined. áBecause the•ll die. Morther and Daddy will. And ¶ll come back hcre ... from ... some chcap bungalow with Maxwcll and babies anΣáputting her hands under her breast≤Ilwith these thini,s twice their size mom nursinp.11 Tics run around ReΣ's attentive face. á¶m already a freak of nature with these ... pillows.11ìI wouldæt sayLhat.11  
ìThen ¶ll hidein here day and night. oh God let me run into the

streets and lct themshoot meI cast dic here in this damp with Maxwelll

and his fancy brats. My life is worth more than that. It isl  
Oh Rcd doæt you see what ¶m offering you7

v

His bare sh(Alders twitch alternately. áI got some idea.11 But then he is turning from hcr to look full into the drapes, at that crack of red-purple light from outside. áBut it is properly Maxwell's.11áWhat -It7 \$hc shouts. áThu it you hit innumerable timcs7In despair he addresses the drapes. áVerna. I told you, also innumorablo timcs, words and hints like that shouldæt even dwell in your sweet... 11

ShP-@ hud bcon rushing at him and nuw scizes an arm. áI doæt want a sweet mouth or a sweet anything else. I just doæt want to be sweet

anymore, Red, you get nothing but poop back.11

ìVerna I 11

10áVernal Redl Vernal Redi Poop poop poop poop∞ Now he rigidifies

the aav-.she had been shaking.

ìVerna, I hate to have to tell you this: but you are getting the  
ideas of a fast girl.11ìShit! Wake up Red, and forget the noble  
idea absolute crap. I want you. I want to be married to you.  
I love @oul Maxwell is a ghost, that's all.11 Thuy both stare at  
the darkened drapes as if Maxwell could materialize there in  
full uniform. The Red turns away from her to stand militarily,  
arms crossed on his soiled blue belly, the hind she had been  
holding him with firmly: Lrig in the dusk.ìI ask ... I ask your  
forgiveness«ìOh never mind that baloney, Red. You're talking like  
a book. I tell you we could do it till the cows come home, and  
not in this awful funeral parlor but even out in some field or  
something.11

With his arms jumping from his belly as if being attacked by some  
stinging insects ) he admonishes Verna: Have you taken leave of  
your senses? Lric tight whisper in reply. áBefore -votk leave  
here, my darling Red, you'll have your little will of me and then  
convince me I'm pure and the more you you you fuck me the purer I  
get. You're crazy and you're making me crazy. Can't you  
me crazy? Jesus Christ Red! Let's do what we want and his knees  
he buries his face in her skirt, sobbing of passion. Fits! I  
don't ever expect to be God.¼ His face pressed between her legs,  
her nostrils narrow droop closed; but he is levering up, frog-  
like, his on her body until it rests on the ample shelf of her  
breasts, Here he must dig it in so as to swing his lower body  
out and, wiggling, manage to get his suspenders to slip off, his  
trousers to slide to his ankles. The effort leaves him gasping  
and drooling.ìYou are soaking me! And your asthma!  
... last breath ... I salute Maxwell.0? His pink rear ascends  
the  
see how you're making not lie! Falling to! There have been fits  
forgiven by you or by as her eyelids slowly face shoving upwards

1 7

sketchy light as he simultaneously lifts her skirt. áMy hands off  
to him.☒

Her eyes roll back. áI'd bite every single button off your fly!  
They very slowly dance around, the entire room, stopping when  
they brush an unseen music stand. áI don't deserve you Verna.  
He deserves you.11ìYou deserve me exactly. Lric and now and  
always. And get your damn nails cut. And allow me to get my  
own pants off please? Always grabbing! I swear to Christ you're  
going to die doing this some day.11ìA n-n-n-n-noble cause. And  
pants is unladylike. As a gentleman I'll take these, uh, drawers  
and ... 11 with mincing steps since his trousers are at his

ankles lip-lace them here over my shirt on this pretty blue globe.11áYou walk like a girl. From the back that is<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> she laughs, and he shushes her, returning, his trousers and flapping suspenders stirring up a cloud of dust reaching halfway to his knees.

11 You you you with your old thing sticking up and talking about ladies and gentlemen. You're training me for your lovely Maxwell, aren't you? And in every way.11 She is casing her down to the floor. áYou're his decoy.11áI'm not fit to kiss your hem.11 They roll into the globe, laughing as it tips and then steadies, blue-black shards of light drifting under the clothing.11But that's not what you're trying to do, is it Red?  
His pink rear flashes up, hangs on the dead light for thought.11My portion is poverty and uncertainty. I can't die here belly up like a dead fish.1111Must you always always talk? He swings brusquely down. áMy God you're a brute!11Thank you.1111Now go easier please. You'll break something.11 But he is suddenly up and staggering back big-footed, momentarily tangled in the drapes wuch

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40send forth ribbons of dust. áDamn!!! he chokes.  
11Now what? Good God almighty what?  
11Tell me something Verna, please. Just one thing I've got to know now!  
11Of course you do ... and in this state. Look at you. You're a danger

to society!11if he knew about me, President Wilson, really knew, wouldn't he pluck me forth? Wouldn't he?11What about me? crics Verna from the floor.11Do not worry I ain't done yet.11 She looks to the ceiling as she groans. áI told you here is a leader never mind the education.11 He is standing between her\* legs now, tottering since his trousers and suspenders and underpants have become tightly wrapped around his ankles; she stares malignantly up at him.11Oh bring that up-pointy thing down here you absolute idiot! In and out! Up and down! Wearing holes in the filthy carpet. You'll burn out before you're twenty.1111Verna! There's there's there's a bonfire in hell,11Well let's not waste it.11 lli!.\*xcuse me wah as the Frog says.11 She is puzzling a way to drop on her with minimal injury to both.11And no more speeches please please please please please!11 She is, though, already revolving gravely, still between her legs, pointing the various

articles in the room. áYou lod a bunch of misfits to tho city baseball championship, kids and old men of thirty. Yo|re just what we need in our natioes capital which will become the capital of the world.11 As she screams, the blotches on his belly seem to darkly run. áThe w()ipld is a fire, a firel ¯m burning up thinking about it I toll you∞ìTake me∞ she chokingly sobs.

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ìOh all righttl∞clumping painfully to his knoes; when muffled hoofbeats are @Card he adjusts his rhythm to them saying 11 I tell old Anderson at the dairy,áPut in the ordcr for trucks nowil causπstarting to thrasháworlΣs going by seventy miles an hourl 11ìWell wolre not. Slow down I Lull you. You wunt to brcak niy backπìExcuse me.11ìYoulrc cxcusod.it

áThank you, Verna. I get going too fast about everything, I ...ìOh God tOh God IìDoet tell me you went boom boomπ he exhales quizzically.

But she is flinging her head from side to side on the gritty rug.ìWhcre is my life? I want my life. ¯m not a silly tart or a precious pumpkin cithor. I could do anything and better than a boyll,

He does a pushup to stare at her and this act somehow makes her stop turning her head to look at him. áAll right then¼ hc challenges,áall right then give me niggers.11ìWhaaaaaπ she stiffens.ìYeah and the worst of the lot. ¯d have them building cities , not passed uut in West Fourth Street hallways. ¯d have white men trying to be like themill Her dark blond hair behind her oithe rug is almost the only thing holding light in the somber room, and she emits a kindof low-pitched whine as he falls down to a climax snorting 11 muh muh muh.11

There is a louden silence after the room has stopped shifting and his panting has slowed and stopped. áYou didet feel anything when I ... 11ìIt landed in the rug.11 Her voicc strangely triumphant. áThe rug full of babies.11ìVornal 11ìRedi You who have already fudged me.¼more than Maxwell will in a lifetime.11

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And closer to his horrifiell facc she mocksá||!Oih muh muh! Now shake another onp,!aF your legs and get me my bloomers.11 In a niomenl slic is tottcrin&,, getting un her underdrawers, and shc places a hand on his sweating shoulder. áSeriously Red, ¯d help with the niggers or anything. I wouldillìA girl? 11ìAn

foeey tool Girls helped with the war effort there and in France. It shows what you know. She gives up trying to hitch her drawers to get both hinds around its neck, to hang there starting up into his face. "Oh please my darling Red, save me from Maxwell. I'll be marrying my father, but both of them spending all day grinding up powders for people to stuff up their bottom holes. I've been a terrible influence on your language. Another reason all good Christians should hate me. Oh my C (id and Lhon I) and I'll die @ the Max and I will in the future for sure. How about your mother? Are you forgetting her? She'll be in the crazy house by then and you know it. Why she has set foot in this room for six months if you can fudge me morning afternoon and night. And if she came in by accident we could tell her we were doing it for Liberty Bonds. Oh I made you laugh. Now can we forget about tomans and glory and the burning future? No. No laughing. I must ... I'll as he is removing her hands from in back of his neck and is walking then over to the drapes, shutting them completely. She cannot see him but can hear his breathing and her own heartbeat. I will never see you again. Never. That is final. I leave here. I must.

I'm sorry, Verna. You're condemning me to death," she states matter-of-factly.

And don't tell me that someday I'll laugh at all of this because how could I

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bear looking back to the day when I began to die. She can hear him fall into a sofa and begin to cry in whispering sobs which become a kind of wheezing after a few moments. They are both silent for a long time until he begins wheezing again and that quite abruptly turns into snoring.

At that point Verna spots the barely glimmering music stand, gets it,

hits him with it until he rolls off the sofa and into an asthmatic attack. One: while he fights for breath in the darkness she snaps it, @s auspiciously over and over the noise becoming more and more distant to her.